

UN Security Council bows to US pressure for a statement against Iran

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After three weeks of behind-the-scenes US bullying, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a statement on Wednesday calling on Iran to halt its uranium enrichment program and giving the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) 30 days to report back. Although amended at the insistence of Russia and China, the statement provides Washington with the pretext for escalating the confrontation with Tehran and its threats of punitive sanctions and military action.

John Bolton, the US ambassador to the UN, immediately seized on the vote as “an unambiguous signal to Iran that the Security Council, charged with the maintenance of international peace and security under the Charter, is now dealing with the issue.” Ruling out any possibility of compromise, he belligerently warned that the US would be “back on the 31st day” in the UN Security Council “given the Iranian record to date of consistently flouting the International Atomic Energy Agency.”

The UN statement is riddled with the same glaring contradictions and rank hypocrisy as the preceding IAEA resolutions on Iran’s nuclear programs pushed through by the Bush administration. It begins by “reaffirming its commitment” to the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and to the right of all states “without discrimination” to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. It then, however, goes on to express “serious concern” over Iran’s decision to resume research into uranium enrichment, even though such activities are not banned under the NPT.

Three years of intrusive IAEA inspections have failed to produce any conclusive proof that Iran is seeking to produce nuclear weapons. Lack of evidence, however, has not stopped the US from insisting that Iran not only suspend, but completely abandon, its research and

development of uranium enrichment as part of plans for an extensive nuclear energy program. Washington has steadily backed Tehran into a corner, at each turn dismissing its efforts to comply with the IAEA and raising provocative new objections.

By contrast, just weeks ago, President Bush was in New Delhi signing an accord to open the way for India to receive international nuclear assistance, even though India has refused to sign the NPT and has built and tested nuclear weapons. The same double standards apply to other American allies, including Pakistan and Israel, both of which have a nuclear arsenal. Once again the US is using the pretext of weapons of mass destruction to further its ambitions to establish American hegemony over the resource-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia at the expense of its European and Asia rivals.

China and Russia, as well as the major European powers, stand to lose billions of dollars of trade, contracts and oil and gas concessions in the event of an economic blockade or military conflict with Iran. That is why negotiations were deadlocked for weeks as Beijing and Moscow, having agreed to refer Iran to the UN Security Council, sought to tone down the UN statement through minor amendments.

A meeting in Berlin yesterday involving Germany and the five permanent UN Security Council members—the US, Britain, France, China and Russia—broke up without any agreement on possible action against Iran. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had mooted UN sanctions as the next step if Iran failed to meet the 30-day deadline.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov declared after the meeting that “exclusively political methods should be used”. He emphatically ruled out the use of force and added: “In principle, Russia doesn’t believe

that sanctions could achieve the purposes of settlement of various issues, especially in the Middle East where there's so much going on."

Dai Bingguo, China's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, also opposed sanctions or military action and in a guarded reference to the US occupation of Iraq declared: "The Chinese side feels there has already been enough turmoil in the Middle East. We don't need any more turmoil."

While Russia and China are well aware of US intentions in the Middle East, neither is willing to come into open conflict with Washington. As a result, despite their reservations and oblique criticisms, both countries fell into line with the other members of the UN Security Council members and handed Washington what it wanted—a UN statement of "serious concern" and a deadline for further action.

The illegal US-led invasion of Iraq makes clear that Washington is not going to be constrained by the UN, with or without the attempts of China and Russia to fight a rearguard action through amendments and diplomatic manoeuvres. Only two weeks ago, the Bush administration issued a new National Security Strategy document reaffirming the Bush doctrine of "pre-emptive" action. US officials have already hinted that Washington will put together another "coalition of the willing" to take punitive action against Iran if the UN Security Council fails carry out US demands.

Appearing before a US Senate panel on Tuesday, US Secretary of State Rice declared that "Iran is the single biggest threat from a state that we face." She made clear that the US had no intention of backing off even if Iran were to agree to every element of the IAEA resolutions regarding its nuclear programs. "We need now to broaden that thinking and the coalition, not just to what Iran is doing on the nuclear side but also what they're doing on terrorism," she said.

Rice's comments also demonstrate that the US is not going to confine itself to UN-sanctioned actions. After referring to possible UN measures, she added: "We have a number of tools, I think, at our disposal, including in sharpening the contradiction between the Iranian people and a regime that does not represent them." While not explicitly calling for "regime change," Rice asked last month for an additional \$75 million to fund anti-Tehran propaganda and opposition groups inside and outside Iran.

Military strikes against Iran were not openly discussed at the US Senate panel as one of Washington's "tools". But US officials, from President Bush on down, never tire of repeating that "all options are on the table". In recent months, there have been a series of leaks in British, German and Israeli newspapers indicating that both the Pentagon and the Israeli military have been engaged in detailed planning for an attack on Iran. Those stories have been accompanied by thinly veiled threats from senior Bush administration figures, including Bolton who bluntly told Fox News earlier this month that "the use of force is certainly an option."

The entire modus operandi bears chilling similarities to the build up to the US invasion of Iraq: US contempt for the UN, unsubstantiated allegations of weapons of mass destruction and a lack of any significant opposition in the political establishment either at home or abroad. This week's UN statement on Iran is one more step towards a reckless new act of imperialist aggression by the gangsters in the White House.



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